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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN FM TURNS DOWN REQUEST TO AUTHORIZE CZECH
NGO

¶1. (U) The Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has, for the time being, refused a request from his Czech counterpart, Cyril Svoboda, to renew the registration of the Czech NGO, People in Need (PIN). PIN had been operating in Chechnya since 2000. But In April, 2005, PIN was told, without any explanation why, that its accreditation would not be renewed.

PIN closed up shop in July, terminating some programs and turning others over to local NGOs.

¶2. (SBU) PIN's Director Simon Panek told the Embassy that during its five years in Chechnya, the FSB (former KGB) tried very hard to find evidence that PIN was linked to Chechen separatists. Panek said that PIN had rented or leased more than 50 buildings for its various programs. One of those buildings was a small house in Grozny used for women's classes and it was in this house that the brother of a local PIN employee was captured by Russian authorities. The brother was allegedly a Chechen terrorist and was, according to Panek, killed. Panek says PIN was unaware that the brother had been hiding in the basement of the house. Panek believes that the Russian government was looking for some reason to shut down the NGO and that this incident was merely a pretext.

¶3. (U) According to Czech media, Lavrov said he did not want to accuse PIN of anything while an investigation was being conducted. He is quoted as saying that it was possible the Czech NGO had chosen untrustworthy staff for its programs.

¶4. (SBU) Panek praised the Czech MFA, particularly Deputy Foreign Minister, and former Czech Ambassador in Moscow, Jaroslav Basta, who, according to Panek stood up to the FSB and demanded that they show evidence that PIN is linked to terrorism. FM Svoboda and Deputy FM Tomas Pojar have also raised the issue with Russian officials. Panek will appear on Russian radio this week to try to demonstrate that PIN is a legitimate NGO which only wants to help. Panek says the EU Commission has provided some support and added he would love to see the US weigh in as well. Panek still harbors some, admittedly slight, hope that accreditation could be renewed if the investigation shows PIN was not deliberately or knowingly sheltering a terrorist.

MUNTER